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ABSTRACT

An explanation of the Bakke case, traditional admissions procedures, current trends and descriptions of six highly selective current programs and their admissions criteria are presented. In the Bakke case, the Supreme Court held that universities may not set quotas, i.e., reserve fixed numbers of places for blacks or members of other minority groups. The Court declared that race may be considered as one factor in developing a diversified student body, and affirmative action efforts are not illegal as long as candidates are evaluated on an individual basis and no quotas are set. Criteria that colleges and universities use in admission decisions are academic achievement and potential, motivation of the student, and the needs of the institution, particularly its desire for a diversified student body. Today most colleges and universities agree that nonacademic experiences such as work or overcoming hardship should count for a great deal, as should appropriate innate skills and human qualities. Of the six school programs that are described, two medical schools and one law school chose not to be identified by name. The other three programs that are described are The College of Human Medicine, Michigan State University; The Medical College of Ohio; and Temple University School of Law of Philadelphia. These examples suggest some general guidelines for affirmative action efforts while maintaining fairness and academic integrity and obeying the legal mandate of the Bakke decision. Recommendations are listed for recruitment, financing, and admission procedures. (SW)

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OUR STAKE IN THE URBAN CONDITION

Pertinent Papers

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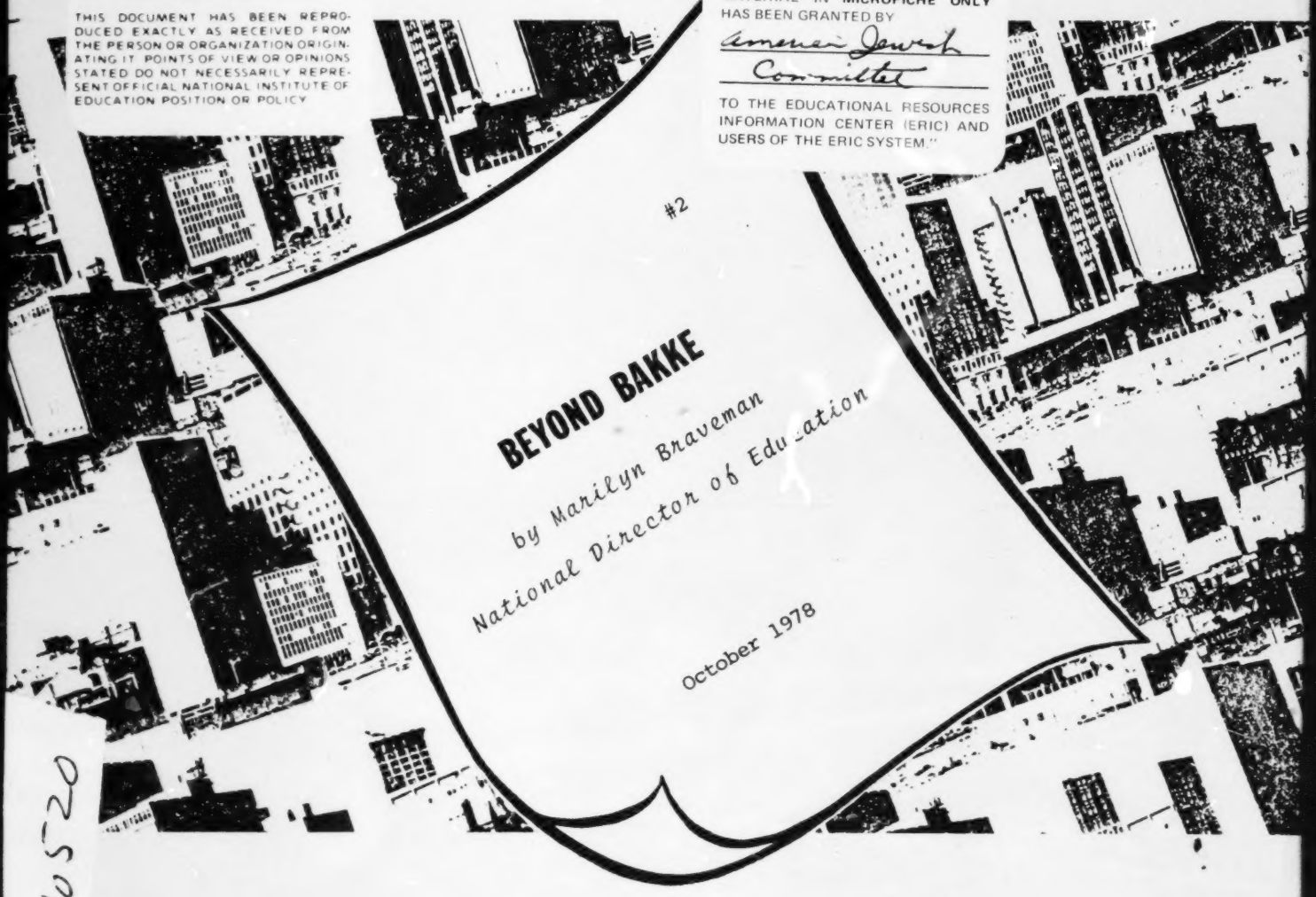

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BEYOND BAKKE

by Marilyn Braveman
National Director of Education

October 1978

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BEYOND BAKKE

In its ruling on the Bakke case in mid-1978, the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed fixed racial quotas in college and university admissions but left the way open for other, less rigid programs to promote the admission of racial and ethnic minorities and women. Although the Court's ruling leaves many questions unanswered, educational institutions are given substantial latitude to develop affirmative action programs.

The efforts already underway in many American colleges and universities suggest that progress can be made through affirmative action without quotas. For some time, increased numbers of minority group members have been sought through targeted recruiting, or by modifications in the admissions process, such as giving greater attention to motivation and background. However, a review of examples to date suggests that no one formula can be expected to work for all schools; each must devise its own in accordance with its tradition and aims.

Few recent issues have divided Americans as deeply as has the question of what criteria should be used in opening the doors of higher education to groups heretofore discriminated against, such as blacks and women.

In a divided and complex ruling on the landmark case of The Regents of the University of California v. Allan Bakke, handed down on June 28, 1978, a 5-to-4 majority of the U.S. Supreme Court held that universities may not set quotas, i.e., reserve fixed numbers of places, for blacks or members of other minority groups. But at the same time, a differently composed 5-to-4 majority of the Court overturned a ruling by a lower court that race must not be considered at all in deciding admissions.

According to the Supreme Court, race may be considered as one factor in developing a diversified student body. Affirmative action efforts to promote admission of groups previously discriminated against are not illegal as long as candidates are evaluated on an individual basis and no quotas are set. Numerical "goals," which specify a target number of minority admissions without reserving places for particular groups are not proscribed.

The Carnegie Council[1] describes quotas as the precise, rigid and permanent assignment of a fixed proportion of places, and goals as a flexible, changeable measure of intent which can be abandoned when no longer needed.

The Court did not say colleges and universities must undertake affirmative action programs; it only said they may do so. Also, it did not state how any such programs should be carried out -- only what must be avoided. With so many hard questions still open, some observers are making extreme predictions. Some say the ban on quotas will spell the end of all affirmative action efforts in admissions, while others insist that any affirmative action program whatever will turn out to be a quota system in disguise.

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1. "Selective Admissions in Higher Education," Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education, 1977

But a look at the record shows that America's colleges and universities have the creative ability to shape answers between these extremes. The following pages are designed to clarify some of the complexities of admission processes and to illustrate how they can be modified and adapted in order to meet changing needs and do justice to the principle of affirmative action as set down by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Traditional Admission Procedures

Just how do colleges and graduate schools decide which applicants for a limited number of places will be accepted and which will be rejected? Such decisions have always reflected a variety of social forces, some of them infrequently acknowledged or not even clearly recognized.

The obvious criteria are academic achievement to date and probable academic potential. But these data are not used in a vacuum; the applicant's apparent motivation is also considered. In addition, the needs of the institution, particularly its desire for a diversified student body, enter into the decision. And there may be additional criteria, depending on the nature of the school.

Academic achievement and potential have long been measured with some degree of objectivity by grade point averages and scores on standardized tests -- such as the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT), the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT) and the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT). Institutions usually set minimum grade point averages and test scores; once above the minimum, some give more weight to such measurements than do others. Some schools also consider, while others disregard, the academic reputation of the applicant's previous school and the caliber of courses completed.

Standardized tests and grade point averages are only moderately reliable, and sometimes they contradict each other. A student may score relatively well on the tests, yet have relatively poor grades, or vice versa. Even students who do indifferently in both sometimes go on to achieve a great deal of success in their studies.

In addition, formal criteria have been pegged at artificially high levels ever since the years following the Second World War, when prestige colleges and universities first found themselves besieged by vastly more applicants than they could handle. Thus, as now applied, these criteria screen out individuals who actually might do fairly well.

Motivation cannot be reliably measured, nor can its effect on a student's performance be predicted with any degree of accuracy. What usually happened is that admission officers, faculty, or admission committee members took a stab at subjectively judging the motivation of a given applicant by such rough-and-ready indicators as a history of employment, successful completion of special projects, or overcoming handicaps.

Diversity of student bodies has been sought by choosing students from different regions, with different academic interests, extracurricular pursuits, athletic skills and so on. Secondary-school background and personal connections are considered as factors in variety, as is the presence or absence of alumni of the school in appli-

cants' families. In recent years, sex, racial or ethnic background and socio-economic status have been added to the criteria.

Changes to Meet Changing Needs

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, many colleges and universities, trying to make up for years of race and sex discrimination, began to recruit vigorously among the aggrieved groups. In some instances that did not serve to bring in qualified applicants and many schools modified or waived admission requirements. But it soon became apparent that students who had been underqualified when admitted often were still underqualified at the end of their studies. At that point, schools began to search for more reliable ways to forecast academic success or failure, particularly for applicants with average grades and test scores. Assessments of motivation and nonacademic experience became much more important as criteria for admission.

Today, most colleges and universities agree that nonacademic experiences such as work or overcoming hardship should count for a great deal. So should appropriate innate skills and human qualities. Thus, an architectural school should look for spatial visualization ability and concern for the quality of urban life, a medical school for scientific imagination and competence in human relations, and so on. Tests to measure such qualities and capabilities are now being developed.

It has been suggested that special consideration be given to applicants who promise to serve in a ghetto or other area of intense need for a specified period after graduation. It is thought that this will serve as a test of motivation and will also help put professionals where they are needed most. As yet, however, there is no consensus on how such a requirement would figure in the admission process. Should the option be open to non-minority candidates? Should students who take the option be permitted to have lower formal qualifications? Should they receive financial aid?

It can also be argued that, since medical schools receive substantial Federal and state funding, all graduates of medical institutions should be required to serve for a time in the areas where needs are greatest. But if so, a commitment to such service could not also be a special criterion for admission under affirmative action programs. And there are those who oppose the idea altogether, on the principled grounds that all graduates should be free to practice where they wish.

The expectations implied in admission vary from school to school today. Some universities assume that students who weather the admission process are thereby proven capable of doing the work and therefore expect them to "sink or swim" without special help. Others are prepared to offer extensive assistance with studies when needed. This last is particularly true of medical schools, because they have so much money invested in each student.

Some New Or Updated Admissions Programs

Except for certain state universities, which base admissions solely on grades, standardized test scores and residence in or outside the state, universities rarely

reveal the details of their admission practices. Many of them hold that such things are a private matter, that this privacy is protected by academic freedom, and that too much disclosure would only invite lawsuits challenging the procedures used.

But whether they talk about their admission practices or not, most universities today apparently agree that the U.S. Supreme Court has given them sufficient leeway to continue affirmative action efforts; that each school must develop its own method in accordance with its aims, commitments and traditions; and that several avenues must be followed at the same time -- for example, broadening recruitment, reaching out to schools or colleges before formal recruitment, and offering programs to help promising students with gaps in certain areas to qualify for admission.

Outlined below are six highly selective current programs designed -- among other things -- to promote admission of previously excluded groups without recourse to the quota method that was outlawed in the Bakke decision. They are presented here not by way of recommendation or endorsement, but rather as an illustration of problems and possibilities for universities as they review their admissions programs in light of the Bakke decision.

The College of Human Medicine, Michigan State University,[2] seeks to train physicians who will provide primary health care, particularly where it is now inadequate. To select the applicants best suited to its curricular goals and clinical needs, the school first awards points on the basis of grades, MCAT scores, and work experience during college. In an assessment of affirmative action potential, additional points may be given to minority, inner city and rural applicants, as well as to persons of whatever ethnicity who have worked with inner-city or rural residents.

Persons ranking in the top 10 percent according to the above criteria are invited for interviews, which are conducted by students and faculty members. Here each candidate is scored according to such factors as problem-solving ability, aptitude for human interaction, freedom from rigidity, ability to see alternatives, and capacity for coping with crises. The two scores are then added together, and the 10 percent ranking highest on the combined score are accepted.

The Medical College of Ohio[2] uses a similar system with some differences which reflect its multiple goals of training physicians capable of going into medical education, research, patient care or a combination of these. A committee of three students, seven faculty members and one administrator seeks out "consistent" applicants, i.e., persons whose academic performance, attitude toward people and service orientation all indicate that they can become capable and caring physicians.

Because different committee members inevitably assign different weights to the various agreed-upon criteria, a uniform protocol has been developed. Applicants are ranked according to points awarded in separate categories. Up to five points each may be given for grade point averages, MCAT scores, and extracurricular research or community activities. A fourth category, also with a five-point maxi-

2. Summarized from research conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute, Los Angeles, Calif.

mum, provides credit for jobs held while in college, depending on the work load handled, as well as for affirmative action criteria. Under the latter head, one point of the five is awarded to persons who are female, belong to minority groups or live in rural areas (or any combination thereof).

Applicants with 12 or more of the possible 20 points are invited for interviews. In line with the criterion of "consistency," a candidate with points distributed across the four categories is favored over one whose score derives from one-sided achievement. Applicants who fall short of 12 points but impress any one committee member as promising may also be invited for an interview.

Law School X prefers to remain unidentified because it is reviewing its practices in light of the Bakke ruling. The pool of minority, handicapped, and "over-age" applicants who are given serious consideration in the first stage generally have lower LSAT scores and grade point averages than non-minorities.

All applications which are considered for admission are then reviewed by a single committee which considers grades and test scores, a personal essay, nonacademic experience and various other factors. All students who are accepted are deemed capable of completing the work. Tutorials conducted by students are available to those who need help at any given point and all grading is anonymous.

The school would like to admit about 40 minority group members each year in a class totaling over 350, but a combination of the number of qualified applicants and the limitation of available financial aid has so far kept the number to about 35.

Medical Program Y, also unidentified by request, is a combined undergraduate-graduate venture designed to increase the number of primary health care physicians and the number of minority group members in medicine. To this end, recruiting is emphasized in inner-city high schools.

The program has gone through some changes since it began. During its first two experimental years, all applicants above a specific grade average minimum were interviewed and ranked by a rating system which relied heavily on intervewers' impressions; a class was admitted, and alternates were listed according to rank. During the second year, admission of alternates was actually handled in separate racial tracks: if a white applicant turned down an acceptance, the place would go to the first white alternate; if a black, it would go to the first black. This procedure was challenged in court and ruled illegal; thus, a new, quantified method had to be developed.

Today, the minimum grade point average is higher and applicants are ranked according to weighted criteria: grades, motivation, character, evidence of commitment. Interview questions are standardized and the replies are computerized. Selections are "color-blind;" race or ethnicity, as well as sex, are identified only after individuals are accepted or rejected. Under the new system, fewer minority group members have been accepted than with the early procedures.

Temple University School of Law of Philadelphia evaluates all applicants on two levels. The first evaluation is based on undergraduate grade point averages; LSAT (including the writing ability) scores; academic honors and achievement; Peace Corps, Vista, military or other service, and employment experience both during and after college. All those above a certain index are accepted. These acceptances

usually constitute from 60 to 80% of the class, but the percentage is not predetermined.

The rest of the class is accepted through a second evaluation, called the Special Admissions and Curriculum Experiments (SpACE) Program, under which applicants who have exceptional backgrounds or for whom standardized test scores are not an accurate reflection of their true abilities may request a review. "Exceptional background" may mean, among other things, membership in a minority or other group grossly underrepresented in the legal profession; a record of overcoming severe economic deprivation; a major physical disability which may prevent the applicant from taking, or may impair the applicant's performance on, the LSAT; a first or primary language other than English; unusually high grades combined with lower standardized test scores; or outstanding leadership ability.

In all cases, the SpACE Committee must first determine that traditional measures (first evaluation) are not accurate reflectors of the real aptitude of the individual applicant, and that the applicant will predictably succeed in law school without any supplementary educational assistance. The Committee then recommends for admission those candidates who, in its considered judgment, present the very best objective qualifications from the entire pool.

Medical School Z is one of many such institutions which had almost no black or female students before 1969 and have since undertaken ambitious corrective measures. It has no special admission program for blacks and women, but seeks to increase their number in various ways, beginning with concerted recruiting. Potential minority-group applicants are encouraged to visit the campus and meet with students in order to see if they like the ambience. A special summer fellowship program is conducted to familiarize minority group applicants with the demands of medical education.

All applicants with grade point averages and MCAT scores above a prescribed minimum are interviewed, and their entire files--including recommendations, autobiographies, and so on--are taken into account. Academic standards are not altered for the sake of affirmative action, but the admission process itself is modified in two ways. First, since most applicants by far are white, qualified minority group members are favored somewhat in the issuing of invitations for interviews--as are women. Second, at least one of the interviewers of minority group candidates must himself or herself be a member of a minority.

Recommendations

Though, obviously, no one admission procedure could meet the needs and traditions of every school, the examples just given suggest some general guidelines for affirmative action efforts--for systematically promoting admission of members of previously excluded groups, while maintaining fairness and academic integrity and obeying the legal mandate of the Bakke decision.

(1) Recruitment

Recruit extensively at high schools and colleges with large numbers of minority students, women, and members of other disadvantaged groups.

Instruct local recruiters about the university's affirmative action intentions and train them to make objective recommendations.

In all brochures and other literature, state clearly what the school's admission policies are and how they relate to the academic program.

Encourage prospective applicants to visit campuses, attend classes and meet with students.

Inform students about course requirements and minimal grade point averages and test scores for admission.

Explain how grades and test scores are weighed and what the chances of admission are with grades and scores at various levels.

Invite minority students to "mini-seminars" or workshops during the summer or the school year to explain the requirements of the course of study and to help them qualify.

(2) Financing

Make special efforts to raise earmarked funds, so financial aid will be available for minority group and women applicants who need it.

Clearly explain to prospective students what financial aid is available, and on what terms.

Inform prospective students what help they can count on in looking for part-time jobs.

(3) Admission procedures

Give weight to demonstrated capacities such as leadership ability, work or volunteer experience in the intended field of study.

Give weight to disadvantages overcome or to be overcome -- for example, language handicaps, physical disabilities, disadvantages due to racial experience or socioeconomic status.

Have a team rather than an individual conduct interviews.

Prepare a standardized program for interviewers, so each applicant will be asked the same questions.

Have each interviewer do an independent evaluation of each applicant.

See that each application is reviewed independently by several persons.

If no interviews are held, prepare detailed written instructions for persons who review applications.

Devise procedures for reconciling conflicting evaluations by interviewers or application reviewers.

The admission process is a key element in any affirmative action effort, but the ramifications of affirmative action principles reach far beyond the day-to-

day work of the admissions office. They touch, for example, upon the social philosophy of the particular school, the maintenance of academic standards, the choice of administrative personnel, and relations with alumni and donors. Affirmative action, in the academic world as elsewhere, can work--but only if the institutions directly concerned and the society as a whole muster the will to make it work.

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